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Vigilance at the Pump Pays Off

By Jon Bruning, Nebraska Attorney General

About two weeks ago, my office opened an investigation into alleged deceptive advertising at gas stations on Interstate 80 at North Platte. Our Consumer Mediation Center had been receiving a growing number of complaints about these gas stations throughout the month of July, including some complaints from out-of-state travelers.

I decided to drop by these gas stations on one of my visits to North Platte. I was surprised at what I saw. The stations were advertising their cheapest gas (E-10) on their marquees and electronic signs, but were only offering that type of gas at one or two pumps. I talked to many "red faced" Nebraskans when they realized the gas they were pumping into their cars was fifty cents more expensive than they thought.

We sent the station owners civil investigative demands and asked them to account for their advertising practices over the past three years. The good news is both stations changed their advertising practices since we approached them. One gas station has gone as far as to mark each pump with a sign pointing consumers to the cheapest fuel.

Under Nebraska's Deceptive Trade Practices Act, the Attorney General has authority to look into businesses whose advertising practices may be considered deceptive. Once we receive more information in response to our civil investigative demands, we will determine how best to proceed.

In the meantime, here are a few helpful tips to avoid being taken advantage of at the pump:

- Always check the price of the fuel on the pump before you begin pumping, no matter how certain you are that it is the correct type of gas.
- If you have concerns about a gas station, research its reputation by visiting the Better Business Bureau Web site at www.bbb.org, or call them in Omaha at (402) 391-7535.
- If you think you are the victim of deceptive advertising, contact our Consumer Protection Division toll-free at (800) 727-6432 or file a complaint online at www.ago.ne.gov.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact our Consumer Protection Division.